



103rd International Labour Conference

Message of Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches

Geneva, 4 June 2014

Mr President,

Mr Director-General,

Excellences, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am addressing you on behalf of the more than 340 member churches of the World Council of Churches from Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Anglican, different Protestant and also Pentecostal traditions, with a total constituency of approximately 560 million people around the world. We are not only neighbours of the ILO here in Geneva; we are present in most of the countries represented in this conference.

We appreciate this opportunity to celebrate the longstanding relationship between the ILO and the WCC, which is based on shared values. The WCC strongly affirms that labour is not a commodity but an essential dimension of human dignity and life in community. We are convinced that aspirations to human dignity and rights must be transcribed into freedom of association and decent jobs. Decent work and social justice are essential elements to enable communities and families, peoples and nations, to move away from insecurity and poverty to a stable future of justice and lasting peace.

But this is not what we see happening around us. We listened attentively to the report of the Director-General who pointed us to the scandal of forced labour and human trafficking which must be addressed firmly and clearly by all of us. Migrants need our support in countries of origin, transition and destination. Many of our member churches have seen this, accompany migrants and speak out for their rights. We also support all efforts to advance decent work and social protection in the informal sector.

We deeply appreciate that Pope Francis shares these concerns, and we agree with him that decent work for all must be included in the post-2015 sustainable development goals.

The ILO affirmed in the Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944 the spiritual dimension of labour. This is indeed an important reason why we can see convergences on the values of decent work and social justice among religious traditions. Christian love of the neighbour, for instance, means not just the concern for our friend, family member or work colleague, but also the nameless victim left abandoned by the roadside, as we are taught in the parables of Jesus. Ignoring them and their dignity and rights betrays the essence of the Christian calling.

Therefore, we have intensified our cooperation with the ILO in partnership with representatives of other faith communities. We are convinced that it needs all people of good will to advance peace through social justice and decent work on the basis of shared values. We are working together for very practical and tangible outcomes especially for young people in their search for decent work. We hope that such initiatives can demonstrate the readiness and commitment of faith communities to cooperate for the common good and contribute actively to overcoming sources of instability and violence.

We wish you a successful session of the International Labour Conference.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary